The Women's Quarterly

AUTUMN 1994 • NUMBER 1

"A simple 'yes' or 'no' will suffice, Madam." DRAWING BY GEORGE PRICE; © 1940, 1968 THE NEW YORKER MAGAZINE, INC.

An Old New Hat For Hillary?

Ellen Ladowsky suggests the First Lady don a pillbox to improve her popularity ratings

Although Mrs. Clinton publicly wields more White House power than her predecessors, she has, in the process, lost the popular approval and trust that were once the birthright of every presidential spouse. Worse — for both her and her husband — she cannot now retreat to the important political advantages that the old-fashioned role of the First Lady offered, and that the presidency cannot easily do without.

In almost every past White House, strategists knew that even when the president was in trouble, the First Lady remained a reliable political asset: her popularity rating typically ran well above her husband's, and they could trot her out while closeting the President until the winds changed. When Richard Nixon was beset by Watergate, Pat Nixon was still greeted by adoring crowds. When Lyndon Johnson faced hostility in the South for his support of the Civil Rights Act, Lady Bird became an effective and popular surrogate. When the 1992 Bush campaign feared that its 'family values' rhetoric was alienating voters, Barbara Bush gave a cozy, prime time convention speech emphasizing inclusiveness.

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Diary

Hair and the Woman

There has been much speculation recently about the First Lady's hair. Maureen Dowd of the New York Times sniped at Hillary Clinton's "parade of hairstyles" in an article critical of her overall fashion sense (or rather, lack of it); Larry King even ventured to ask Mrs. Clinton, when she appeared as a guest on his show, why all the different cuts. "I love to play with my hair," was her reply.

By my count, The First Lady has "played" with her hair at least five times since her husband was inaugurated (it might now be six: I noticed on the news last night that she'd gotten rid of her bangs again). That's after changing it once during the 1992 campaign (going from long to shoulder length), for a total of six (seven?) different hairstyles in less than two years. I think Mrs. Clinton was being disingenuous in her answer to Mr. King, like Princess Di passing off her bulimia as merely her latest fad diet. No woman goes through more hairstyles than Barbie unless there is something troubling the head underneath; thus, Mrs. Clinton's "hair crisis" is more serious than simply a lack of style, as Ms. Dowd suggests.

I've long held the theory that when a woman wants to change her life, or some aspect of it that is bothering her, she first does something to her hair. If she's only mildly unsatisfied, she might have highlights put in, or ask for a slightly shorter cut than usual. But if she's feeling more desperate - if her marriage has just ended, or she's lost her job - she'll get a permanent wave, or dye her hair some unlikely color (like black, or henna orange).

Most of Mrs. Clinton's new hairstyles have coincided with upheaval in her personal life or some new policy initiative. Shortly after becoming First Lady, for instance - a harrowing life change even for the heartiest trader in cattle futures - Mrs. Clinton abandoned the hairbanded look of her legal profession days for the cropped, utilitarian sweep of a network correspondent. This style didn't last long. As pundits raged about her unelected but increasingly powerful administrative role, Mrs. Clinton herself seemed a bit uncertain about what she was doing. She rapidly went through two more hairstyles. Then, as things heated up with Whitewater and Paula Jones, Mrs. Clinton went at her hair yet again, producing bangs and a bob. This time even the editorialists at the Wall Street Journal digressed from their attacks on her husband's administration to ponder her newest coif (opinion: the previous one was more flattering).

The biggest knock against Hillary Clinton has been the perception of her ideological rigidity, especially when compared to her supple husband. But if my theory holds true, her hairstyles suggest the opposite: that an inconstant and insecure inner core manifests itself outwardly in her hair just as her husband's does in his shifting public statements.

Successful female leaders, no matter what their politics or beliefs, share an indifference towards their hair. Think of Golda Meir, Indira Gandhi, Margaret Thatcher, and even past formidable First Ladies: Eleanor Roosevelt, Nancy Reagan, Jackie Kennedy. They pick a style that suits them and stick with it — for decades. The voters of England would have rightly felt unnerved if their outwardly stern Iron Lady had faced the unions in a perm one week, and then hammered away at Jacques Delors in a shag the next. Nor, by the way, is this a case of women being held to a double standard: Remember the scorn heaped upon Jimmy Carter when he changed the side of his part.

I don't wish to be too hard on the current First Lady. One can only imagine the demons she subdues every morning when she opens her newspaper. Who wouldn't feel the urge to retreat to a salon? We all have our own histories of bad hairstyles. Every time I sit down in that swivelling, padded chair and am confronted with my reflection (glaringly, under those lights, with the further humiliation of a towel twisted into a horn), only to emerge poorer but no more beautiful an hour later, I feel quietly vexed. Why can't the hairdresser transform me?

But then, fortunately, I am not in a position to influence the most powerful nation on earth. When I see Mrs. Clinton ascend a podium wearing yet another hairstyle, I gulp. If I were dining with Boris Yeltsin, or had been assigned the task of remaking the nation's healthcare system, I would hope one of the last things on my mind would be: Should I try a tint?

*

Welcome readers, by the way, to the premier issue of *The Women's Quarterly*. I hope this journal will be a lively forum for women's writing — that is, women's writing with small "w's" and "women" spelt as it is in the Oxford English Dictionary, not "wymyn" or "wimmin."

We are published in conjunction with a fairly new Washington-based organization, The Independent Women's Forum, a gathering of women from various political and professional backgrounds: Many are mothers as well as, say, lawyers and some are simply mothers and others simply lawyers but none are simple-minded. *The Quarterly* hopes to interest and challenge them (and sympathetic friends) with articles that might be rejected by more blinkered women's publications.

As such, we welcome submissions, comment and debate.

- Danielle Crittenden, Editor

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What is this Dreck?

Martha Bayles sizes up 'gangstas' and their rap on the culture

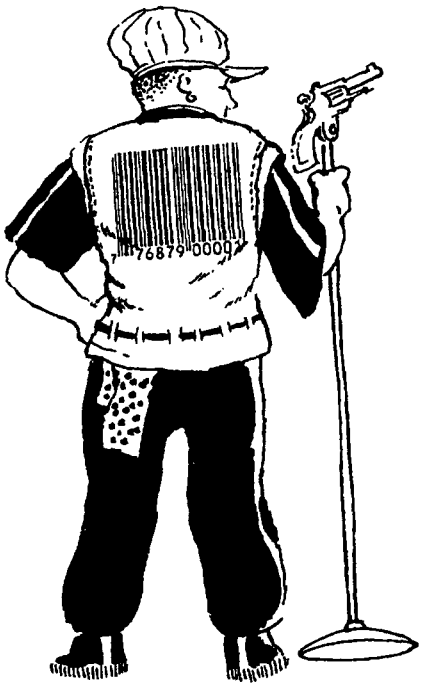
FOR SEVERAL WEEKS in 1993, the title at the top of Billboard's album chart was "The Chronic," produced by Dr. Dre and featuring the rapping of an up-and-comer, Snoop Doggy Dog. One of the most popular cuts was "Rat-Tat-Tat-Tat." The chorus is well known to most young Americans:

"Rat-a-tat-tat-tat, rat-a-tat like that.

Never hesitate to put a nigger on his back."

On the cover of his current chart-topping album, "gangsta" rapper Snoop Doggy Dogg (his real name is Calvin Broadus) pays tribute — not to God, the way most rappers do — but to his probation officer. And well he might. In November he was indicted in a Los Angeles Superior Court for murder. According to the rapper, he was driving in a Los Angeles park when his bodyguard shot another black youth in the back. The motive? The other guy had been "dissing" Snoop. So..."Rat-a-tat-tat-tat."

It's worth noting that there was no such thing as "gangsta" rap in the early 1980s, when Tipper Gore, Susan Baker and other members of the Parents' Music Resource Center called for Senate hearings on rock lyrics. The music they found upsetting then was heavy metal, featured on MTV in videos depicting women being chained, caged, beaten, raped and dismembered. For the more marginal groups like Slayer, pushing out the envelope meant singing about the thrills of necrophilia ("I feel the urge, the growin' need/To fuck this sinful corpse/My task's complete, the bitch's soul/Lies raped in demonic lust").



But today, in a culture where degradation is considered an answer to degradation, even female singers are striking similar postures. One hot new performer, "Boss" (nee Lichelle Laws of Detroit), is a middle-class graduate of Catholic schooling. Boss started off making harmless raps, but after a Los Angeles record producer told her that she "didn't curse enough" she beefed up her act. Her recent debut album, "Born Gangstaz," has sold more than 360,000 copies and includes a cut called "blind date with boss" (sic), in which there is no music or rapping at all, just male-female banter. A woman asks a group of men "So what you wanna do?" When one of them says "I wanna fuck you," the woman replies, "You wanna fuck me baby? All right, I'm gonna step out for a second. Wanna step in the back? Yeah, we're goin' to the bathroom." Then we hear four shots ring out, groans, and silence.

This is a long way from "Stop! In the Name of Love." The question is, how did we end up with this dreck? Why do so many kids want to listen to it?

There are some standard explanations. One school of thought, beginning with Marshall McLuhan, has long blamed cultural decline on the electronic media. In this view, we live in what communications theorist Neil Postman calls a "technopoly," a society ruled by media that, unlike their print predecessors, are inherently irrational. The discontinuous, non-linear nature of the electronic media interferes with human cognitive and moral development. It was Andy Warhol who said, "If it moves, they'll watch it." According to Postman, they will never be able to do anything else.

To refute this school of thought, you and I need only to look at ourselves and most of the people we know. It's clear, from the example of countless educated, literate people who are also conversant with the electronic media, that the human mind can, given the opportunity, handle both the electronic and the print media, just as it can handle more than one language. The problem, as any parent can tell you, is finding the right balance.

There is a second, more compelling

DRAWINGS BY CHARLES JAFFÉ

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AUTUMN, 1994 • NO. 1

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The Women's Quarterly is published by the Independent Women's forum, a non-profit Section 501(c)(3) organization.Contributions are tax deductible to the extent permitted by law.

The opinions and views expressed in the Quarterly are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Independent Women's Forum.

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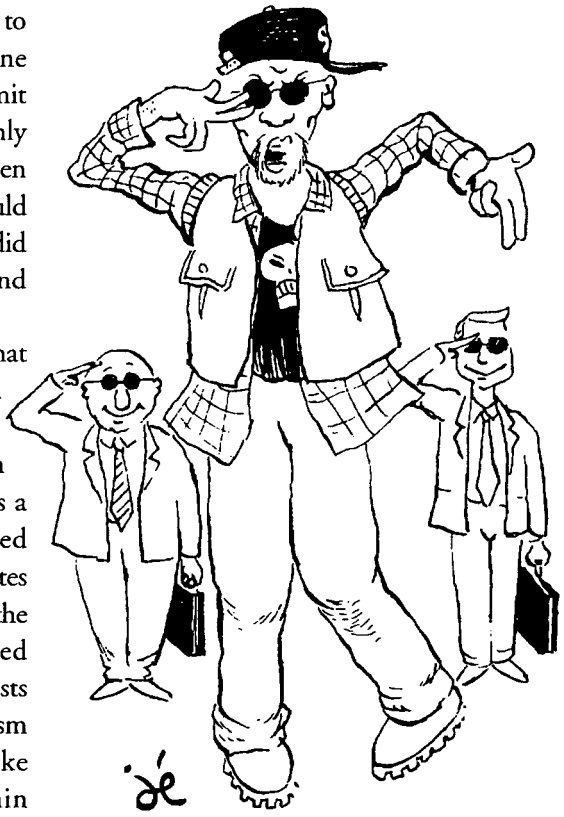
explanation. Tipper Gore and the late Allan Bloom didn't have much in common, but both made names for themselves blaming the ugly excesses of popular culture on commerce. Gore styled herself the leader of a grassroots revolt against greedy corporations whose product — offensive rock — was nothing more than a commodity with proven harmful effects, like flammable children's pajamas. Bloom, for his part, denounced record company executives as "robber barons" and, in his book "The Closing of the American Mind," denounced the rock industry as "perfect capitalism."

The explanation offered by Bloom and Gore is conventional wisdom for everyone with a gripe against popular culture, from the religious conservatives who advocate total censorship to the purple-haired grunge rockers who accuse anyone with a record contract of "selling out." Yet this explanation is also fairly easily refuted. Obviously the profit motive has done much harm to art and culture. But it has also done much good. If, for example, we admit that jazz and the cinema are the only truly original American art forms, then we must also admit that neither would have developed as dynamically as it did without the incentives, exposure and competition provided by the market.

Nonetheless, many people feel that any acceptance of commerce will lead to the collapse of artistic standards. Typically such fears come from using the phrase "popular culture" as a stand-in for an older, more loaded term, "mass culture." This usage dates back to the "mass culture" debate of the 1940s and '50s, one that involved many intellectuals and social scientists steeped in the Marxist social criticism of the 1920s and '30s. People like Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin and Herbert Marcuse saw a link between the American mass media and the systemic mind control attempted by totalitarian regimes. Because totalitarianism had crushed intellectual and artistic freedom in Europe, that generation of thinkers was fearful that the mass media would do the same thing in America. Hence they drew a sharp, uncrossable line between serious art and "mass culture."

It is surprising how many intellectuals on both the left and right still draw this line. Even when they champion the triumph of democracy and capitalism over defunct socialism, their views on art and culture are still colored by the assumption that objects bought and sold for a profit cannot possibly be art.

Unlike these intellectuals, I would not use the word "popular" as the opposite of high, serious or good. In every time and place there have been works of art that possessed both popu-



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larity and artistic merit; and conversely, works that are low, unserious and bad are not necessarily popular. If that were true, then every fool in Hollywood would be a millionaire, instead of just some of the fools. Forty years ago, commerce was blamed for taking all the sex and violence out of popular culture. Movies and television were criticized for their prudery (depicting married couples sleeping in twin beds) and their optimism (attaching happy endings to tragic novels and plays). Today commerce is blamed for injecting gratuitous sex, violence and pessimism into popular culture.

Instead of explaining a variable (the level of sex, violence and pessimism in the society) to a constant (commerce), why not explain it with another variable — namely, the deeper cultural changes that have taken place over the same period?

I trace these changes along two axes. First there is the impact of what I call "perverse modernism" on popular culture. By that phrase I mean the anti-art, anti-social impulses of the European avant-garde which gave rise historically to such movements as decadence at the end of the 19th-century, dada in the 1920s, surrealism and the theater of cruelty in the 1930s, and post-war retreads of these movements such as happenings and performance art in the '50s and '60s. These anarchistic, nihilistic impulses have been grafted on to American popular culture — especially the most responsive part of that culture: the music.

Some people date the decline of popular music back to the rock and roll craze of the '50s. I disagree, on the grounds that there is a strong continuity between the music and cultural values of Louis Armstrong, Benny Goodman and Frank Sinatra on the one hand, and Fats Domino, Chuck Berry and Elvis Presley on the other. That continuity shows up in musical elements (such as the ability to swing) and extra-musical ones (such as showing courtesy to one's audience). In my view, this continuity persisted through such mid-60s strains as soul, Motown and the early Beatles.

The real break came in the late '60s, when the counterculture went sour. Rock began attracting people who were less interested in music than in using such a hugely popular medium for culturally radical purposes. The harbingers of this break were the Rolling Stones, who relished the blues but did not hesitate to make the blues over in the image of the stale avant-gardism they had picked up in art school. Thus, they made their reputation by shocking the public and being arrogantly rude to their audience in a way totally alien to the blues.

Things got worse in the 1970s, when a bigger and more dedicated contingent of cultural radicals climbed aboard the rock bandwagon. By the end of that decade, the strain known as punk had effectively turned rock into a species of performance art, not music. Created by a fashion designer, Malcolm McLaren, who had attended six British art schools but knew nothing about music, the band known as the Sex Pistols fostered a cult of deliberate ugliness that attacked and degraded music, along with everything else. It's no accident that Rick Rubin, one of the driving forces behind "gangsta" rap, came out of punk.

The second axis of cultural change is the complex racial dynamic of American culture. This country's distinctive musical idiom was created, and historically dominated, by black people. The white mainstream has constantly appropriated it in ways both

Women's World

Cynthia Grenier digests the women's monthlies

Fashion Tip:
"Red Hot: Skirts for Men!"
(Redbook — 2/93)

Household Hint:
"What No One Tells You About Using a Vibrator: Don't use it in the shower." *(Glamour — 3/93)*

True Romance:
"Women in Love: Young Lesbians. They're Fresh, They're Proud, They're Comfortable with Their Sexuality."
(Mademoiselle — 5/94)

Our Readers Ask:
Q. "How important are blow jobs to a relationship?"
A. "Very." *(Mademoiselle — 5/94)*

Cynthia Grenier writes 'The MagTrade' column for The Washington Times.

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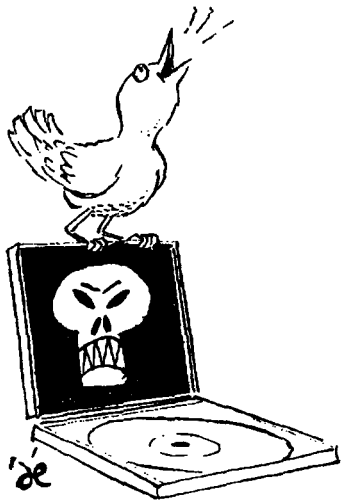
warmly appreciative and coldly exploitive. Here, our worst problems stem from the tendency, in both the foes and friends of Afro-American music, to reduce it to a crude caricature of dehumanized sex.

Focusing on the simple, pounding beat of heavy metal, Bloom wrote that all rock music "has the beat of sexual intercourse." Taking exactly the same view, Steven Tyler of the band Aerosmith boasts, "It's rhythm and blues, it's twos and fours, it's fucking." Neither acknowledges that the monotonous beat of heavy metal (and indeed of much rap) is a travesty of the rich, tireless, complicated rhythms of Afro-American music at its best.

This caricature overlooks the fact that Afro-American music originally functioned in many different spheres, including work, story-telling, celebration and (most importantly) religion. To accept the caricature is to forget a complex history and, worse, to insult the people who created the music in the first place.

So is the culture beyond hope?



We know that censorship of popular culture is both practically and constitutionally impossible. As the experience of the former Eastern bloc attests, even censorship at its most ruthless cannot control the flow of the electronic media. In this country, the great bulk of offensive music — even hard-core "gangsta" rapping — does not fall under the narrow purview of obscenity law as derived from the 1973 Supreme Court decision, Miller v. California. There will always be experts willing to defend the "serious literary, artistic, political or scientific value" of material like 2 Live Crew's "The Fuck Shop." And, as both fundamentalists and feminists have learned the hard way, the First Amendment stands solidly in the way of any attempt to expand the scope of the law.

I would argue that our only hope of reversing the current malignant mood of the culture is...the market. But I am no libertarian, expecting the market to do tricks by itself. It can only respond to a shift in public taste, brought about by the usual combination of things we cannot control and things we can. Optimistically, I count among the latter the old-fashioned tools of persuasion, debate and education. We need to trace the roots of our present predicament to their true sources in the larger culture.

Instead of saying, "I don't know much about art but I know what I don't like," we need to follow the cultural historian Jacques Barzun, who boldly asserts: "It is because I understand this work of art that I dislike it." ◆

Martha Bayles is the author of Hole in Our Soul: The Loss of Beauty and Meaning in American Popular Music *(The Free Press: 1994).*

Dispatch

Getting Mary Poppins Off the Dole

Anne Applebaum suggests a new type of 'workfare'

REMAINS OF THE DAY is a film which irked many British reviewers, and it is not hard to guess why: the scenes shot around a large English country house were too rose-colored, the country landscapes were too nostalgic for British taste. As for the vast kitchens filled with cooks and pantry maids, the under-butlers polishing the brass, and the maids sweeping the stairwells, they seemed almost calculated to annoy. For there is nothing so fraught with connotations, nothing so touchy in British life as the subject of servants.

It is a pity, because a discussion of servants is something which might help provide the solution to another British

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problem, one which is equally unmentionable: that of the permanent disappearance of jobs for unskilled workers. Not long ago, the British government released a set of economic figures showing recovery underway — inflation rose less than expected, retail sales were up more than expected — but unemployment rising. That was partly seasonal, but it also reflected something else: the side effect of growth, these days, is not necessarily higher employment figures. On the contrary, growth can just as easily bring a new crop of redundant workers along with it.

In Britain, as in America and Western Europe, the nature of unemployment is beginning to change, along with the nature of work. This leads to semantic difficulties. Once, the "leisure class" was a small group of people who lived in leisure; the "working class," on the other hand, did the work. Now, although the stereotypes and prejudices remain, a combination of free trade, high West European minimum wages and advancing technology (industrial robots, computers which replace clerical workers) has made the developed world much wealthier, but at the cost of turning those categories upside down.

Put crudely, that means that the *de facto* working class are more and more often either highly-skilled, relatively high-paid workers in industrial countries, or else factory laborers in the developing world. Those who work, work harder than those of comparable wealth ever did in the past. Leisure, on the other hand, is something enjoyed only by those who live off benefits in the world's otherwise rich, post-industrial societies. The new leisure class — the west's unskilled workers — were once the domestic servants and later factory workers; now there are no jobs for them at all.

Yet although we are all aware of the problem of unemployment, the main point hasn't sunk in: West Europeans and Americans still haven't come to terms with the fact that there are now hundreds of thousands of people who cannot reasonably expect to have jobs, ever again — not because of laziness or a cyclical downturn, but because the

nature of the economy has changed. The only people even talking about the problem are either protectionists, who would urge an end to free trade and moveable jobs, thereby putting an end to growth as well, or advocates of job-training programs which are famous for their failure rate or, in France and other countries, advocates of shorter work weeks and greater impoverishment for all. Defenders of free trade and opponents of the welfare state seem happy to pretend that the problem of permanent unemployment doesn't exist.

But if factory jobs are disappearing, why not put unskilled workers to tasks which they once did very well? Making it easier for the new working class — that is, the middle class — to hire domestic servants is a much better and more intelligent solution to the problem of long-term unemployment than anything else proposed. And it has worked in the past. Take, for example, not "Remains of the Day," which depicted a large country house, but "Mary Poppins," a film which depicted a bank manager and his nanny in 1910. Before income tax, before unemployment tax, that bank manager could afford not only a nanny but two other staff as well.

If bank managers could afford three domestic employees now, unemployment would disappear. This is not an idea derived from a longing to return to the past, but a practical solution, particularly for the female half of the new working class, which by some measures now works harder than the male half. Not long ago, a British journalist calculated that 30,000 pounds per year was required just to pay the expenses of a nanny, putting that luxury well out of the average person's range. Obviously, the many women who cannot find a place for their children in state day-care systems (or are reluctant to put them there), and cannot afford this kind of money are making do, but not always happily: in Britain, nearly a million children, one survey told us earlier this year, are regularly left home alone by their working parents.

To help solve the unemployment and to help working mothers at the same time, governments must get used to the idea of reducing or waiving the heavy national insurance taxes which are now imposed on those who employ nannies, childminders, cooks and cleaners. In one or two countries, the subject is beginning to be discussed. In Denmark, where people are less emotional about these things, the govern-

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ment has begun subsidizing businesses which provide domestic services, in order to help middle-class families — and to reduce unemployment, which hovers above 12 per cent.

Yet the embarrassment about servants remains. In America, the secret problem of working mothers and the absence of servants appeared in the form of "nannygate," the discovery that prominent judges and lawyers, along with thousands of other working women, were quietly employing illegal aliens to take care of their children. Yet far from sparking the wide-spread debate on working women and childcare which it should have, the women who had chosen to employ illegal aliens were forbidden to hold public office.

Most of the technical arguments against the tax-deductibility of the wages of domestic servants could be overcome. It ought to be possible, for example, to calculate the loss to the budget from such tax breaks, and adjust it so that it does not exceed the amount spent supporting the unemployed. Most people prefer to do things legally; part of the loss in taxes would also be made up for by people who would register the existence of their illegal employees for the first time.

But it is, of course, the thought of taxpayers subsidizing vast country houses filled with cooks and cooks' assistants in the manner of "Upstairs, Downstairs" or "Remains of the Day" (as if so many of them still existed) which makes the idea undiscussable. Few remember "Mary Poppins" and the pre-war world in which it was possible for the middle-class to employ help.

Everyone knows that the state is not wealthy enough to support the attentive childcare that most women want, or omnipotent enough to create a set of job training programs that would actually get people back to work. Everyone knows it — but the resistance remains. ◆

Anne Applebaum is deputy editor of The Spectator *magazine in London.*

Free To Be "That Girl"

Elena Neuman revisits the utopian hits of Marlo Thomas and friends

ONE RECENT SUNDAY afternoon I spent a few hours with my one-year-old daughter, Talia, hanging around Tree Top Toys — the 'Brentanos' of Washington toy stores. That was when I saw it: tucked away between "Raffi" and "Peter, Paul and Mommy" was the musical icon of my '70s childhood, "Marlo Thomas and Friends, Free to be You and Me."

I knew all the songs by heart. "Sisters and Brothers," "Glad to Have a Friend Like You," "When We Grow Up." I remembered how scarred that precious piece of vinyl was by the time I entered puberty. I slapped down twelve bucks to purchase the cassette version of this treasure for my little girl, ripped off the cellophane and eagerly slipped it into the car's tape deck to enjoy on the drive home.

But my trip down memory lane was quickly cut short. For while I could still recite every tune and every verse, I'd never actually paid much attention to the lyrics. "It's all right to cry," the burly quarterback Rosey Grier assures

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a fictional little boy named Dudley Pippin. Alan Alda follows with an admiring ditty about William, a boy who desperately craves a doll. Marlo Thomas sings triumphantly about the closing down of Girland, a place where "good little girls pick up after the boys." There is also a story about a tender, sweet young thing who wears "lovely starched cotton dresses and a dab of perfume behind each ear." This "little lady" eventually gets her comeuppance when she's eaten by a tiger after insisting "ladies first, ladies first." And then there is the updated tale of the Greek heroine Princess Atalanta, who, in this version, defies her father's wishes for an arranged marriage by competing in a running race with the men of the kingdom and winning her freedom.

As we drove along, I found myself doing a slow burn. My daughter, strapped in her car seat, happily jiggled her legs to the lively beat, oblivious to the cheerful propaganda being poured into her ears.

Now, I realize that as a 27-year-old journalist from the Upper West Side of Manhattan, I'm not supposed to have any trouble with this Marlo Thomas view of the world. I've often, in fact, thought of myself as a beneficiary of many of the changes brought about by feminism. But now that I'm a working mother, the world of opportunity seems less attainable — and maybe even less fulfilling — than Marlo had me believe when I was six. My favorite song when I was young, "Mommies are People," struck me as particularly disingenuous when I heard it again:

"Mommies are women / Women with children / Busy with children and things that they do / There are a lot of things, a lot of mommies can do.

"Some mommies are ranchers or poetry makers or doctors or teachers or cleaners or bakers / Some mommies drive taxis or sing on TV / Yeah! Mommies can be almost anything they want to be!"

I used to believe every word of this song. And so, obviously, did a lot of my peers. Women now constitute nearly 50 per cent of the nation's workforce; I am hard-pressed to think of a friend my age who is not absorbed in building her career. So long as I was just doing that, too, I continued to believe Marlo: that when it came time to have children I would somehow be able to squeeze them in along with everything else.

Now, listening to the car stereo, I wondered why Marlo didn't sing about how to juggle Gymboree classes with office deadlines, nor offer a chorus about the frantic search for a sitter when the regular calls in sick ten minutes before an important meeting. There was no tune, either, set to the rhythm of a breast pump emptying the glands of a guilt-ridden mother executive, hunched in a corporate bathroom stall. Nor were there any salving lyrics that addressed the most common refrain among working mothers: that we are neglecting our children's welfare in our pursuit of personal satisfaction and — thanks to Marlo and friends — social acceptance. But perhaps Marlo didn't know about these things; she never had children.

Just the weekend before my trip to the toy store, I'd been discussing the dilemmas of working motherhood with my neighbor, also a journalist and a new mother. In mid-conversation she'd reached into her wallet and extracted a yellowed, crumbling clipping from the Wall Street Journal op-ed page by a woman who wrote about the courage it took to leave her career and stay home with her kids — and how rich her life was as a result. "I take this out each day and read it to try get the courage to do the same thing," my neighbor told me. "But I can't do it. I'm too chicken. I'm afraid of what people will think of me. I'm afraid of what I'll think of myself."

And now here was Carol Channing, exhorting her listeners to do the housework together: "Little boys, little girls, when you're big husbands and wives/If you want all the days of your lives to seem sunny as sunny weather/Make sure when there's housework to do that you do it together." A study I'd read came to mind, showing that in dual-earner families, women do approximately 80 per cent of the housework, shopping and cooking. The feminist revolution depended partly on men picking up their own socks. But Dudley Pippin, now grown, is probably working 16 hour days in some corporate law firm and never sees his children, much less a laundry hamper, or mop.

As Atalanta's father remarks, times have changed — indeed. But I wondered, are the now grown-up girls of "Free to be You and Me" better off today twenty years after the closing down of Girland? Are William's sons thrilled to find dolls in their Christmas stockings rather than Power Rangers? Are Atalanta's children happier being raised in day care or by nannies as their mother competes with her male colleagues to be made partner?

As we pulled into our driveway, I had no answers of course. But after I bundled Talia out of the car, I discreetly removed the cassette and slipped it under the car seat where I hoped it would be forgotten among the pretzel crumbs and stray change. ◆

Elena Neuman is a Washington-based journalist.

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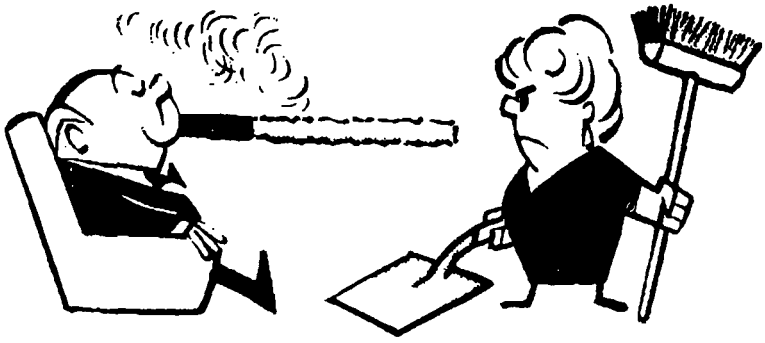
And when President Kennedy's reputation was suffering from the Bay of Pigs fiasco, his wife polished American standing abroad by captivating France.

Hillary Clinton is giving no comparable political boost to her husband in his moment of need. While her approval ratings remained high through most of last year, by March 1994 an ABC/Washington Post poll showed her to have sunk to a 53 per cent favorable rating — six points lower than her husband's. Another recent poll reveals that a majority of Americans believes that she has too much power in the White House. Having chosen the role of a politician rather than that of a politician's wife, she gets lumped in with the public's disenchantment with political figures.

Of course, no one expected Mrs. Clinton to behave like her predecessors — and for many reasons she couldn't. She is the first presidential spouse to have a law degree and the first to have earned more than her husband before arriving in Washington. But what truly separates her from the previous women in the White House is not her role as a professional woman — the explanation she offered during her delicately arranged East Room press conference in April — but rather the unabashedly political nature of her activities.

Former First Ladies exercised political leverage too. But when they chose to influence White House decision-making, they did so behind the scenes, in the bedroom so to speak. Their public roles, however, remained conspicuously non-political; they had to be to offset the public's suspicions of this private influence. Even Eleanor Roosevelt, Mrs. Clinton's role model, constantly downplayed her role in shaping policy. So there they were, out cutting ribbons and winning approval points for their indisputably worthy causes like adult literacy, historical preservation and highway beautification.



Hillary Clinton, though, has shown no interest in concealing her influence. Shortly after her husband's election, she vaguely suggested that she might become a "voice for children," but Mrs. Clinton has not yet scurried behind a cause as Nancy Reagan did with drug abuse prevention when she was seen as too meddlesome. Nor has Mrs. Clinton attempted to cultivate broad support outside her immediate political constituencies. Her public image is instead almost entirely bound up with the Administration's efforts to pass legislation. That's why Americans are inclined to be suspicious of Hillary Clinton's role in Whitewater and commodity trading. They know her only as a high-powered insider and a lobbyist for the White House agenda, not as an altruistic advocate for good causes.

The paradox of Hillary Clinton's reinvention of the First Lady role is that she has become more, not less, dependent on her husband's political standing. When Mrs. Clinton ponders her next role after retiring as Health Czarina, maybe she should consider something more — dare we say it? — decorative. If the first results hadn't been so awful, one might suggest that she emulate Jackie Kennedy and redo the White House. Instead, how about an anti-smoking crusade? ◆

Ellen Ladowsky is a Washington-based journalist.

But What if He Calls You "Babe" and It's Not His Hand That He Extends?

Emily Post, in the 1950 edition of her "Etiquette: The Blue Book of Social Usage," reminds us of the correct way a woman is to be introduced to the President of the United States. She writes:

"' Mr. President, I have the honor to present Mrs. Jones,' Or, if officially, 'Mrs. Jones of Chicago.'

"(Mrs. Jones bows deeply. If the President offers his hand, Mrs. Jones gives him hers. She should not offer hers should he fail to make this gesture of courtesy – which is of course most unlikely.)"

We'll say.

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One last observation . . .

Sophia's Choice

Mary Ellen Bork notes how the Holy Trinity has become a foursome in some Catholic circles

THE PURPOSE OF the most recent "Re-Imaging" conference, held last November in Minneapolis, was to signal a "second reformation" and to welcome the goddess "Sophia" into one's prayers. More than 2,000 participants (including several orders of Catholic nuns) from 49 states and 27 countries, were told that churches must free themselves from the grip of sexism and classism, and give women a new theology grounded in their uniquely female experience of the divine.

Each woman was encouraged to imagine "her own truth". There were singers from South Dakota Indian tribes. Some of the participants, according to the Spring issue of "Faith and Freedom", "arranged (themselves) in Native American 'talking circles' and engaged in 'scribble writing' with crayons and pastels, blessed 'rainsticks,' danced 'holy manna' and joined in Hawaiian chants and rousing Zulu songs." They then prayed to the goddess "Sophia," the spirit of Wisdom and the conference. It was not clear how she related to the triune of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit but the women were encouraged to name Sophia, to "reimagine God in name and image." This experience was to be shared with the group.

Still, there was no mystery who Sophia was. Lawyer Katherine Kersten, a board member of the Institute on Religion and Democracy who attended the meeting, said "Participants were told to look in the mirror to find her. The conference program put it succinctly: Sophia 'is the place in you where the entire universe resides.' She has just one commandment and participants learned it: 'Freely bless your own experience.'"

Over the course of the four-day conference it became clear that Sophia, while present in every woman, was most fully manifested in bodily functions and sexual encounters. A closing communal blessing of milk and honey included a prayer repeated by everyone, "Our maker Sophia, we are women in your image...With the hot blood of our wombs we give form to new life...Sophia, creator God, let your milk and honey flow...With nectar between our thighs we invite a lover, we birth a child; with our warm body fluids we remind the world of its pleasures and sensations...We celebrate the sweat that pours from us during our labors...We celebrate our bodiliness, our physicality, the sensations of pleasure, our oneness with earth and water."

This ritual, of course, has more in common with the ancient gnostic practices that started in ancient Egypt and worshipped the goddesses Isis, Gaia and Sophia. This effort to reject the language and imagery of the Christian tradition is not leading to renewal but to pagan notions that have nothing to do with the Christian gospel. One wonders why people who think this way cannot find it in their hearts to leave the Christian church and live their new religions. ◆

Mary Ellen Bork is a member of the board of directors of The Catholic Campaign for America. *This article was excerpted from a speech she gave on feminism and the church to the* Independent Women's Forum *in March.*

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The Women's Quarterly

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